

Vermont State Board of Education Monthly Report – January 2009

The State Board of Education held its regular monthly meeting on January 20th in Montpelier. The Board welcomed new commissioner Armando Vilaseca, and recognized the service of Bill Talbott, who has served as acting commissioner since June.

Education Cost – Board members discussed the role the Board has with respect to education funding and the current downturn in the financial arena, and the resulting impact this has on the cost of education. The consensus was that the Board would like to explore ideas on cost containment while not compromising education quality, as well as identify cost drivers and expenditures that comprise education spending. The result of this discussion will be the convening of a small group of knowledgeable individuals to engage in this conversation. The purpose of the conversation will be to “identify and discuss items which have the potential of alleviating pressures on the cost of education, while preserving the quality of the education which is presently being provided to Vermont's children.”

In a far-ranging discussion, the Board also addressed the issues of governance, funding, current constraints of school districts, how the Board can “help” local boards, how the current economy affects schools, the Education Fund, what the Legislature could do to take money from the Education Fund, unfunded mandates and local control. Bill Talbott explained how education funding has changed since 1983. Commissioner Vilaseca clarified that local voters have the final say in what they think is important for their schools and students (both legal and community expectations). He noted that laws and mandates for Vermont schools are complex enough to make it difficult to achieve efficiencies.

FY2010 Budget – As a result of discussion on the FY 2010 budget at its January 20th meeting, the Board held a special meeting on January 23rd to finalize its FY 2010 budget recommendations.

Bill Talbott reviewed information provided to Board members. The information provided FY2010 Education Fund Grants at two levels: meeting the current statutory requirement and level funding.

Motion: Chris Robbins moved, seconded by Fayneese Miller, that the State Board of Education

support the Governor's recommendation to level fund per pupil spending and categorical grants to schools for FY 2010, with the understanding that applicable statutory changes will be required. Motion approved 6-1.

Comments from Board members prior to this action included:

- The Board recognizes that all of state government, private business, and taxpayers are being asked to make extraordinarily hard choices in these difficult times. The State Board of Education will be consultative and compassionate in supporting local boards in achieving this fiscal imperative.
- The Board acknowledges this decision will be difficult for local boards and districts, given that districts have statutory requirements, such as tuition payments and technical education costs over which they have no control.
- In addition, the Board conversation emphasized that if the Legislature does not make the necessary changes to applicable statutes this recommended action via the motion cannot occur because local boards and the department must comply with the law.

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For information on Department of Education sponsored events beginning February 2009 visit <http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/dept/calendar.html>. The calendar is updated regularly.

For more information on the Vermont State Board of Education, visit: <http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/mainboard.html>.

To view approved minutes of SBE meetings: <http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/board/schedule.html#approved>

To view State Board of Education's Monthly Reports: http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/board/schedule.html#monthly_reports

2009 State Board of Education Meeting Dates: February 17; March 17; April 14; May 19; June 16

